**RECOMMENDED DOMESTIC VIOLENCE ASSESSMENT WORKSHEET,**

**POLICIES, AND PROCEDURES**

Screening for current and past history in relationships involving domestic violence assists in recognizing increased risk for re-assault and lethality and is an important step to take when responding to domestic violence. Law-enforcement is the front line in many domestic violence situations and has a unique opportunity to gather critical information at the scene. This Domestic Violence Assessment Worksheet was created to assist law-enforcement in gathering information about history and known risk factors. The completed worksheet allows police to have a better understanding of risk factors present in each case. It can be further provided to victim advocates to assist victims in accessing resources, the Clerk Magistrate determining bail, and to the District Attorney’s Office prior to arraignment to assist in appropriate bail decisions and future actions in the case. In addition, these worksheets can be helpful to Intimate Partner Abuse Education programs, assist in custody, visitation, 209A and any other civil matters where safety of adults and children should be considered. By using the worksheet and sharing information about history and risk factors in each case, victims can learn about the risk they face and law enforcement, court, and advocacy services can be better informed and tailor their response to each case.

**Why do a Domestic Violence Assessment?**

Research suggests that many victims of domestic violence do not utilize the available domestic violence services in their community. According to the Maryland Lethality Assessment Program (LAP), only 4% of domestic violence murder victims had ever received domestic violence services. The research further suggests that the risk of assault was reduced by 60% if a victim sought services or went into a shelter. Also, at least 50%of the victims who were killed did have some type of prior contact with law enforcement.

Experience has shown victims deny and minimize the severity of the situation in order to keep themselves safe. By conducting a domestic violence assessment, not only does the victim become more aware of services that are available, but it gives police officers a clear picture of the potential danger in that household. By having these questions on hand, and a part of an officer’s routine, it expands the standard line of questioning and enables officers to obtain history that victims may not have thought to disclose.

These policies and procedures have been designed to create a consistent response in assessing a victim’s risk for serious re-assault through a series of standard questions that are asked of the victim. It is important to note that conducting an assessment is one of the many elements used in domestic violence intervention. Negative answers during the assessment does not necessarily mean that the victim is not in danger. If the officer has an intuitive feeling that the situation is more serious than what the victim has disclosed, it is important for the responding officer to heed to those feelings, and respond accordingly.

This Domestic Violence Assessment is designed to be used when responding to domestic violence situations identified below.  It is important to note that certain populations have additional lethality risk factors not included in this initial assessment. Recent data from the MA Department of Public Health identifies five special populations and geographies: persons with disabilities, blacks, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people, immigrants and residents of rural communities are 2-3x more at risk for IPV.  For example, lethality for immigrant victims rises based on answering the additional question if the victim is ashamed about what an abuser does to him/her.   It is important to refer back to your training when dealing with the many special populations in our communities

Finally, this assessment worksheet was developed by a multi-disciplinary group of professionals in law-enforcement, the criminal justice system, advocacy agencies and educators. Part of the underlying work to develop this worksheet was the comparison of local and national worksheets currently being used to assess risk of lethality. These include the Dr. Jacquelyn Campbell’s Danger Assessment and danger assessment when assessing risk with immigrant women, the Maryland Lethality Assessment Program, The Danger Assessment for Law Enforcement developed by The Jeannie Geiger Crisis Center and the worksheets used by the Maynard, Fitchburg, Cambridge, Arlington and Brighton Police Departments, all police departments in Plymouth County, and the worksheet used by the Northwestern District Attorney’s High Risk team members.

**1. When should a domestic violence assessment be conducted?**

The assessment should be completed when there is a current or previous intimate relationship between the parties and when the responding officer:

* is taking out criminal charges or making an arrest for a domestic violence crime or,
* believes strangulation or suffocation has taken place or,
* believes the potential for **danger** is high or,
* is responding to **repeat individuals** or location

**If officers arrive at a scene of a verbal argument, the officer should research if the police have responded to that same location or the same individuals before. If this is not an isolated incident or if the verbal argument caused one party to fear the other, the officer should consider doing an assessment. A victim party does not have to have been physically assaulted to be at risk of lethality or re-assault. There are a many other behaviors and actions within the relationship that can place the victim at high risk of re-assault.**

If someone applies for an Emergency 209A at the police station:

* If the victim enters the department requesting a 209A, the officer assisting the victim shall assess if an assessment should be conducted. If it is determined that the assessment should be conducted, the officer should conduct the assessment before filling out the 209A paperwork. The answers given on the assessment worksheet can also provide the officer with information to give to the on-call judge.

**2. Once you have completed your initial interview with the victim and have determined the need to conduct an assessment, keep the following in mind**:

* If there is need for emergency medical attention, conduct the interview after the victim has been treated.
* In the case of a disclosed sexual assault, follow department procedure.
* Make every effort to conduct the victim interview in a private setting, away from the suspect and, if possible, other family members.
* Officer(s) should use the assessment worksheet and document complete responses by the victim.
	+ If the victim answers yes to any of the questions, the officer should ask for more details.

**During the initial interview with the victim, the officer should:**

* Obtain preliminary information from the victim about the current reported incident and details leading up to the incident, whether there is a relationship between the victim and suspect, prior history of abuse, any court orders, use of weapons, or use of alcohol/drugs.
* Record the victim's “excited utterances” and emotional and physical condition.
* Note demeanor, body language and other nonverbal communication and document in the police report.
* Document the victim's injuries and inquire about injuries that are not visible, especially if there has been a report of strangulation.
* Obtain temporary addresses/phone information from the victim.
* If further investigation is required, this shall be discussed with the Shift Supervisor

**3. Responsibilities once the assessment worksheet has been completed:**

If the officer determines and/or feels that the victim is at high risk of re-assault and needs immediate assistance, the officer shall:

* Inform the victim of his/her concerns for the victim’s safety based on the answers given to the assessment questions.
* Inform the victim that there are a wide range of free and confidential services available.
* Provide statutory victim rights and any brochures that detail your local area domestic violence resources.
* Inform the victim that it’s part of your protocol to contact an advocate and that the call is free and confidential. If the victim declines, the officer should share his/her concerns for the victim’s safety based on their assessment. If the victim still declines give them the hotline number to call at a later time.
* Offer to contact Safelink or a partnering local domestic violence agency for the victim to speak with an advocate.
	+ If the victim gives the officer permission, the officer will then contact the local advocacy agency to provide confidential advocacy services.
* Inform the victim of Restraining Order information and options.
* The officer will then file the completed assessment with the department. This will be separate and apart from the incident/arrest report. Note in the incident/arrest report if an assessment was completed. Each department should consider an electronic storage folder for these forms.
* Provide a copy of the assessment and incident/arrest report to any community advocate that you assisted the victim in contacting.
* Immediately provide a copy of the assessment and incident report to the Civilian Domestic Violence Police Advocate (if any).
* Provide the assessment to the District Attorney’s Office prior to arraignment.
* The officer will communicate information gathered from the assessment to the clerk magistrate/bail commissioner if the abuser was placed under arrest.
* If there is no arrest/charges, a copy of the assessment and report/log shall be given to the Civilian Domestic Violence Police Advocate if the department has one.
* The officer will conduct a Board of Probation Check (BOP) on the offender, whether an arrest has been made or not. This is an important process in notifying probation and parole officers that the police were called to the home.

4. **When there is a report of strangulation/suffocation:**

* When a victim reports that he/she has been strangled or suffocated, a Strangulation Worksheet shall be completed.
	+ This form shall be completed for any strangulation reported during this incident or any recent strangulation disclosed during interview of the victim.